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PREF, SU

SUBJECT: JUSTICE MINISTER FRIEDMANN ON REFUGEES, IPR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

¶1. (Summary) (SBU) In a meeting with Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann in Jerusalem on June 4, the Ambassador discussed the Magen David Adom (MDA)/Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulance dispute, IPR issues, Darfur refugees, and family reunifications requests for Palestinian refugees from Iraq. Friedmann unexpectedly said that approval for relocating 54 Palestinians from Iraq to West Bank/Gaza would not be a problem, and offered to facilitate their reunification. The Minister acknowledged his recent appeal for humane treatment of Darfur refugees, but also emphasized the competing Israeli concern of preventing a flood of potential refugees from the Sudan. Friedmann offered to look into the intellectual property rights (IPR) issues, and asked for specific cases of U.S. concern. The Ambassador also discussed recent NGO allegations that some Palestinians have been tortured by Israeli services, noted the impending release of the Department's 2007 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report for Israel, and thanked the Minister for the participation of Ministry of Justice (MOJ) officials in a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) conference in Washington in January 2007. (End Summary)

TIP

¶2. (U) In their first official meeting, the Ambassador discussed a number of issues with Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann, an academic with little political experience when Prime Minister Olmert appointed him in February 2007 to head the MOJ. The Ambassador informed the Minister that the 2007 TIP Report for Israel would be released to the public on June 12, and congratulated Israel on its adopting a labor trafficking law. The Ambassador also expressed U.S. expectation of increased investigation and prosecution of labor trafficking offenses, and of appropriate Israeli investment into support -- notably a shelter -- for labor trafficking victims. Friedmann agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that preventing trafficking also had a security benefit to Israel by concurrently hindering the flow of terrorists and drugs into the country.

REFUGEE ISSUES

¶13. (U) Discussing Darfur refugees that have applied for refugee status in Israel, Friedmann reaffirmed that the Sudanese should be treated humanely, but emphasized that "on the other hand" there was a problem with how many people Israel can absorb and how long they would stay. Friedmann suggested the problems should be resolved by the international community, who should "share the burden" both economically and in the acceptance of refugees.

¶14. (U) The Ambassador raised the issue of another group of refugees -- Palestinians in Iraq. Surprisingly, given the GOI's record in recent years on family reunification, Friedmann said there would be no problem accepting the Palestinians, after the Ambassador reassured him that the number in question was only 54 people. (Friedmann clarified that Gaza might be problematic given the current situation, but saw no issues with reunifications in the West Bank.) The Minister promised to do what he could to facilitate the process with the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and the Israeli security forces, and the Ambassador promised to convey the relevant information to Friedmann's office.

MDA/PRCS AMBULANCE ISSUE

¶15. (U) The Ambassador reminded Friedmann of earlier MOJ involvement in the accession of Magen David Adom (MDA) to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) -- an accomplishment the U.S. invested considerable effort to bring about. Noting U.S. concerns that the ongoing dispute over the stationing of Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances in an East Jerusalem hospital, the Ambassador warned that fallout from this ongoing dispute

could potentially lead to a move by Arab nations to expel MDA at the Movement's November 2007 international conference. Friedmann saw the issue as the province of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health, however, and gave no indication that MOJ would re-engage on this matter.

HUMAN RIGHTS

¶16. (U) The Ambassador asked Friedmann for his perspective on allegations of torture of Palestinian security prisoners by the Israeli military and government in a Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) report. Friedmann said he was not aware of any specific cases referred to in the report, but insisted that all cases of suspected abuse were investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted. Friedmann defended Israeli human rights practices, calling it a liberal country "considering it has been at war since its inception."

He noted that despite its constant war status, Israel did not have the death penalty. The Minister suggested a comparison of how Israel -- in an "ongoing war" -- treats Palestinians with how other countries treat their minorities, saying Israel gives "favorable representation" to Arabs in government and business. Friedmann said it was not only Arab countries (that fall short in the comparison) but that the Ambassador might "look at how other Western countries acted in times of war" and treated minorities "suspected of collaborating with the enemy."

IPR CONCERNS

¶17. (U) The Ambassador raised U.S. concerns about Israeli IPR protections and loopholes in draft copyright legislation in the Knesset. Friedmann asked for specific cases illustrating U.S. concerns, i.e. with internet protections. The Ambassador provided a nonpaper and promised to send a letter to Friedmann with details attached.

¶8. (SBU) When the Ambassador asked about his relationship with the Attorney General, Friedmann stressed that the Attorney General was "completely independent" and that Friedmann did not intervene in his activities. The Ambassador also thanked the Minister for the participation of MOJ officials in a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) conference in Washington in January 2007. When discussing the MLAT meeting, Friedmann brought up the question of Israelis incarcerated in U.S. prisons, and his preference for their relocation to Israeli prisons whenever possible.

BIO NOTE

¶9. (SBU) Friedmann was accompanied by his media advisor Tzachi Moshe. The Minister emphasized his lack of political experience, and claimed that his lack of political affiliation gave him independence that was important in his position. Friedmann made no mention of his efforts to resurrect the so-called "infitada law" (which bans Palestinian suits for non-warfare related damages) that the High Court of Justice overturned in 2006.

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